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**Global change and rural transformation in the Lao PDR: A meso-level analysis of landscapes as contexts for sustainable development**

Rural areas of the Lao PDR are currently undergoing rapid transformations related to global change and globalization. A key characteristic of this process is that decisions on land management are not restricted to local actors anymore but are increasingly embedded in a multi-level setting, where regional, national and even global actors are more and more important. Correspondingly, research oriented toward sustainable development of land systems faces a double challenge. On the one hand, human-environmental interactions at the local level can not be adequately understood without integrating political, social, and economic driving forces operating independently at various levels of spatial scale. On the other hand, the differential influences of such driving forces produce dissimilar land cover/use outcomes thereby reinforcing the uniqueness of any local context. The resulting limited validity for out-scaling and generalization has also been referred to as the 'one place-one time syndrome'. Scientific research needs to overcome this double challenge in order to avoid the immanent danger of losing its relevance for evidence based decision and policy making toward sustainable development.